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DATE: 17 May 68 25X1

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GAC GWA CJS TAD

JDJ JER DWR HGB EH

MEH TAW LKP JS JK

D F

1. WE ASSUME ASSESSMENT IN QUESTION IS 13 MAY LIMDIS

APPRAISAL (MACV 13635 SENT PARIS FOR GEN. GOODPASTER [REDACTED])

25X1 [REDACTED] WE HAVE GONE OVER THIS PAPER CAREFULLY AND HAVE MIXED REACTIONS. SOME OF IT SEEMS SOUND, BUT WE HAVE RESERVATIONS ON SEVERAL POINTS OF DETAIL AND SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH SOME OF ITS PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS.

2. ON DETAILS, EARLY MAY ATTACKS PROBABLY MARKED OPENING OF NEW SUMMER-AUTUMN CAMPAIGN RATHER THAN THIRD PHASE OF WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN AS SUGGESTED IN MACV'S PARA 2. NEW CAMPAIGN IS OBVIOUSLY FOLLOW-ON TO ITS PREDECESSOR WITH IDENTICAL OBJECTIVES OF ERODING AND, IF POSSIBLE, COLLAPSING GVN AND RVNAF, PLUS ADDED AIMS OF INFLUENCING PARIS TALKS AND

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SIMULTANEOUSLY EXPLOITING TALKS IN MANNER CONSTITUTING ONE MORE ELEMENT OF POLITICAL PRESSURE IN SVN.

3. AS YOU REALIZE, AFTER CAREFUL REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND THOROUGH DISCUSSION OF ISSUES, ^{25X1} AND MACV DISAGREE ON BASIC METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ENEMY STRENGTH CALCULATIONS AND, HENCE, ON STRENGTH ASSESSMENTS. MACV'S PARAS 2 A. (4) THROUGH (7) LIST COMMUNIST STRENGTH IN TERMS OF "COMBAT EFFECTIVE" BATTALIONS, WITH NUMBERS CITED REPRESENTING ONLY ABOUT ONE-HALF OF TOTAL NUMBER OF ENEMY MANEUVER BATTALIONS. WE BELIEVE THIS SUBSTANTIALLY UNDERSTATES COMMUNIST MILITARY STRENGTH. MACV'S CRITERIA FOR NON-COMBAT EFFECTIVE UNITS ARE SOMEWHAT ARBITRARY, AND BASED LARGELY ON RELATIVE STRENGTH OF UNITS. SINCE INFORMATION ON REPLACEMENTS FOR KNOWN LOSSES IS USUALLY AVAILABLE ONLY WELL AFTER THE EVENT, CURRENT STRENGTH ASSESSMENTS ARE INHERENTLY UNDERSTATED.

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MOREOVER, UNITS REGARDED BY MACV AS "NON-COMBAT EFFECTIVE" ARE NOT NECESSARILY SO REGARDED BY THE COMMUNISTS, AND FREQUENTLY PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVE OPERATIONS. BECAUSE OF THE RELATIVELY HIGH RATIO OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS IN COMMUNIST UNITS, THEY ARE OFTEN MORE THAN MATCH FOR EQUIVALENT RVNAF COMPONENTS, DESPITE PERSONNEL SHORTAGES. NUMBERS OF COMMUNIST MANEUVER BATTALIONS, INCLUDING "NON-COMBAT EFFECTIVE" UNITS, AS LISTED IN MACV'S CURRENT ORDER OF BATTLE FOR EACH CORPS, ARE AS FOLLOWS (COMBAT EFFECTIVE LISTED PARENTHETICALLY): I CORPS - 92 (47); II CORPS - 45 (25 - 28); III CORPS - 50 (14 - 17); IV CORPS - 22 (11 - 13). THESE FIGURES ALSO PERTINENT TO ^{MACV} PARAS 2 B (1) THRU (4).

4. WHILE WE AGREE GENERALLY WITH OVERVIEW OF ENEMY CAPABILITIES LISTED IN MACV'S PARA 3, WE BELIEVE MACV OVER-STATES THE ENEMY'S PERSONNEL AND LOGISTIC DIFFICULTIES, AND OVEREMPHASIZES HIS VULNERABILITIES, WITHOUT COMMENSURATE

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ENUMERATION OF HIS STRENGTHS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE REGARDING PERSONNEL. EVIDENCE ALREADY PROVIDED DELEGATION ON INFILTRATION INDICATES A FLOW OF MORE THAN 20,000 PER MONTH THIS YEAR, IN CONTRAST TO MACV'S ESTIMATE OF 12,000. WE BELIEVE IN-COUNTRY RECRUITING MAY ALSO EXCEED MACV'S IMPLIED FIGURE OF 8,000 MONTHLY. THUS TOTAL INPUTS PROBABLY EXCEED 30,000 PER MONTH, A FIGURE 50 PERCENT HIGHER THAN MACV'S ESTIMATE. THIS WOULD SUGGEST A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE ENEMY'S RELATIVE CAPABILITIES DURING THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, AND IN HIS ABILITY TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS DESPITE HEAVY LOSSES.

5. ON BROADER MATTERS, WE DISAGREE WITH MACV'S THESIS THAT THIS YEAR'S COMMUNIST OFFENSIVES "HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN DESPERATION AND WEAKNESS." HANOI ALMOST CERTAINLY ENGAGED IN A MAJOR STRATEGIC REVIEW LAST SUMMER AND DECIDED TO FOREGO PROTRACTED WAR, TO DRIVE FOR A DECISIVE TIPPING OF THE SCALES

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IN 1968, TO COMMIT (OR EVEN TO GAMBLE) THE ASSETS REQUIRED IN THIS DRIVE FOR A DECISION, AND TO AUGMENT ACTION ON THE GROUND IN VIETNAM WITH A FIGHT-TALK STRATEGY AT SOME CONFERENCE TABLE DURING 1968. DISQUIET OR EVEN DISCOMFITURE AT ITS ANALYSIS OF THE THEN CURRENT TRENDS IN THE BASIC AREAS OF THE STRUGGLE -- TACTICAL REVERSES ON THE BATTLEFIELD, COMMUNIST CASUALTIES, GVN POLITICAL PROGRESS, AND THE SHRINKAGE OF THE POPULATION BASE TO WHICH THE COMMUNISTS HAD RELATIVELY UNCONTESTED ACCESS -- ALMOST CERTAINLY INFLUENCED HANOI'S DECISIONS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT HANOI'S MID-1967 DECISIONS REFLECTED AN AIR OF DESPERATION. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE THAT HANOI FELT ITS NEW STRATEGY WAS LIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL. CAPTURED DOCUMENTS AND PUBLISHED WRITINGS SHOW THAT HANOI'S CALCULATIONS INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

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A. THE U.S. TROOP BUILD-UP IN VIETNAM WAS UNLIKELY TO EXCEED 700,000 TROOPS BECAUSE OTHER U.S. COMMITMENTS, ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WOULD PRECLUDE THE MOBILIZATION NECESSARY TO EXCEED THAT CEILING.

B. THE DRV AND VC HAD RESOURCES TO COPE WITH U.S. FORCE OF UP TO 700,000, IF A PROPER STRATEGY WAS EMPLOYED.

C. THE PROPER STRATEGY SHOULD AIM AT FRUSTRATING (HENCE, "DEFEATING") THE TWO-PRONGED U.S. STRATEGY OF "SEARCH AND DESTROY" AND "PACIFICATION."

D. TO FRUSTRATE THESE PRONGS, COMMUNIST FORCES HAD TO GAIN THE INITIATIVE IN BOTH LARGE AND SMALL UNIT ACTIONS, THUS DICTATING TIME, PLACE, AND CONDITIONS OF MAJOR OPERATIONS AND PINNING DOWN INCREASED NUMBERS

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OF U.S. / ARVN FORCES TO DEFEND REAR AREAS.

E. TO GAIN AND HOLD THE INITIATIVE, COMMUNIST FORCES WOULD HAVE TO BE REINFORCED AND DEVELOPED TO ACHIEVE BETTER MIX OF MAIN FORCE (INCLUDING SAPPER AND SPECIAL ACTION COMPONENTS), LOCAL FORCE, AND GUERRILLA-MILITIA ELEMENTS; THESE THREE TYPES OF FORCES WOULD BE DEVELOPED EVENLY IN CONTRAST TO EARLIER EMPHASIS ON MAIN FORCES.

F. CONTINUOUS ACTIONS BY THESE REINFORCED MILITARY COMPONENTS WOULD BE COORDINATED WITH STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE POLITICAL AND SUBVERSIVE PROGRAMS AIMED AT WEAKENING ARVN, BROADENING THE BASE OF NLF, AND UNDERMINING THE GVN.

G. COORDINATED "THREE-PRONGED" (MILITARY, POLITICAL, AND TROOP PROSELYTING) OFFENSIVE WOULD BE CONDUCTED

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WITH EQUAL EMPHASIS IN THREE "STRATEGIC AREAS" (HIGHLANDS, COUNTRYSIDE, AND CITIES).

H. EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS STRATEGY WOULD, BY FRUSTRATING U.S. OBJECTIVES, CAUSE THE U.S. TO LOSE WILL TO CONTINUE WAR AND THUS CREATE CONDITIONS FAVORABLE FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ON HANOI-NLF TERMS.

6. THE NEW FRONT PROGRAM ANNOUNCED LAST SUMMER, THE EARLY PHASE OF THE WINTER-SPRING CAMPAIGN, THE TET OFFENSIVE, CREATION OF THE ALLIANCE, AGREEMENT TO TALK UNDER CONDITIONS SHORT OF COMPLETE CESSATION OF BOMBING, THE EARLY MAY OFFENSIVE (AND FORTHCOMING ATTACKS), ARE ALL PART OF THIS STRATEGIC PACKAGE. ALTHOUGH THEIR MILITARY AND POLITICAL SUCCESSES HAVE BEEN LIMITED, THE COMMUNISTS AS YET HAVE NO REASON TO ABANDON THEIR STRATEGY OR LOSE CONFIDENCE IN ITS CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

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7. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE COMMUNISTS INTENDED THEIR EARLY MAY OFFENSIVE AS A "REPEAT" OF THE TET FORMULA. RATHER, IT WAS MORE LIMITED EFFORT AIMED AT DEMONSTRATING THEIR PROWESS ON THE EVE OF TALKS AND AT FURTHER SHAKING GVN. THE SCOPE OF ATTACKS WAS, OF COURSE, FURTHER DILUTED BY PRE-EMPTIVE ALLIED OPERATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT COMMUNISTS WILL PROBABLY ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND ON POLITICAL, PROPAGANDA, SUBVERSIVE FRONTS AS WELL DURING THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. WHILE THEY WILL SEEK TO CHARACTERIZE THEIR OFFENSIVE AS "CONTINUOUS," WE EXPECT ITS INTENSITY WILL FLUCTUATE IN RESPONSE TO NEED BOTH FOR PERIODIC REGROUPING AND RESUPPLYING OF THEIR FORCES, AND FOR INFLUENCING THE COURSE OF TALKS IN PARIS.

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8. THE MACV ESTIMATE SPECIFICALLY CONSIDERS ONLY THE MILITARY ASPECT OF THE STRUGGLE. COMMUNIST MILITARY ACTIONS, HOWEVER, HAVE PRIMARILY POLITICAL AIMS. OUR ADVERSARIES ARE ATTEMPTING TO DISCOVER AND DEVELOP THAT MIX OF PRESSURES -- MILITARY, PSYCHOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC, ETC. -- SUFFICIENT TO CAUSE THE GVN TO UNRAVEL. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE PROBLEMS WHICH WILL MOUNT UNLESS THEIR EFFORTS YIELD MORE OBVIOUS AND IMPRESSIVE RESULTS THAN HAS YET BEEN THE CASE, BUT THEY WILL NOT GUAGE THEIR SUCCESS BY ANY SIMPLE CALCULATION OF TERRAIN WON OR LOST OR RELATIVE CASUALTIES SUFFERED IN PARTICULAR ENGAGEMENTS. FOR THEM, THE TEST OF THEIR STRATEGY WILL BE THEIR ABILITY TO ERODE THE GVN'S IMAGE AND ABILITY TO GOVERN AND THEIR ABILITY TO MAXIMIZE INTERNATIONAL,

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PARTICULARLY AMERICAN, OPPOSITION TO CONTINUATION OF THE STRUGGLE IN VIETNAM.

END OF MESSAGE

*Requests views on the special overall assessment of the SVN military situation which COMUSMACV sent Washington several days ago.

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